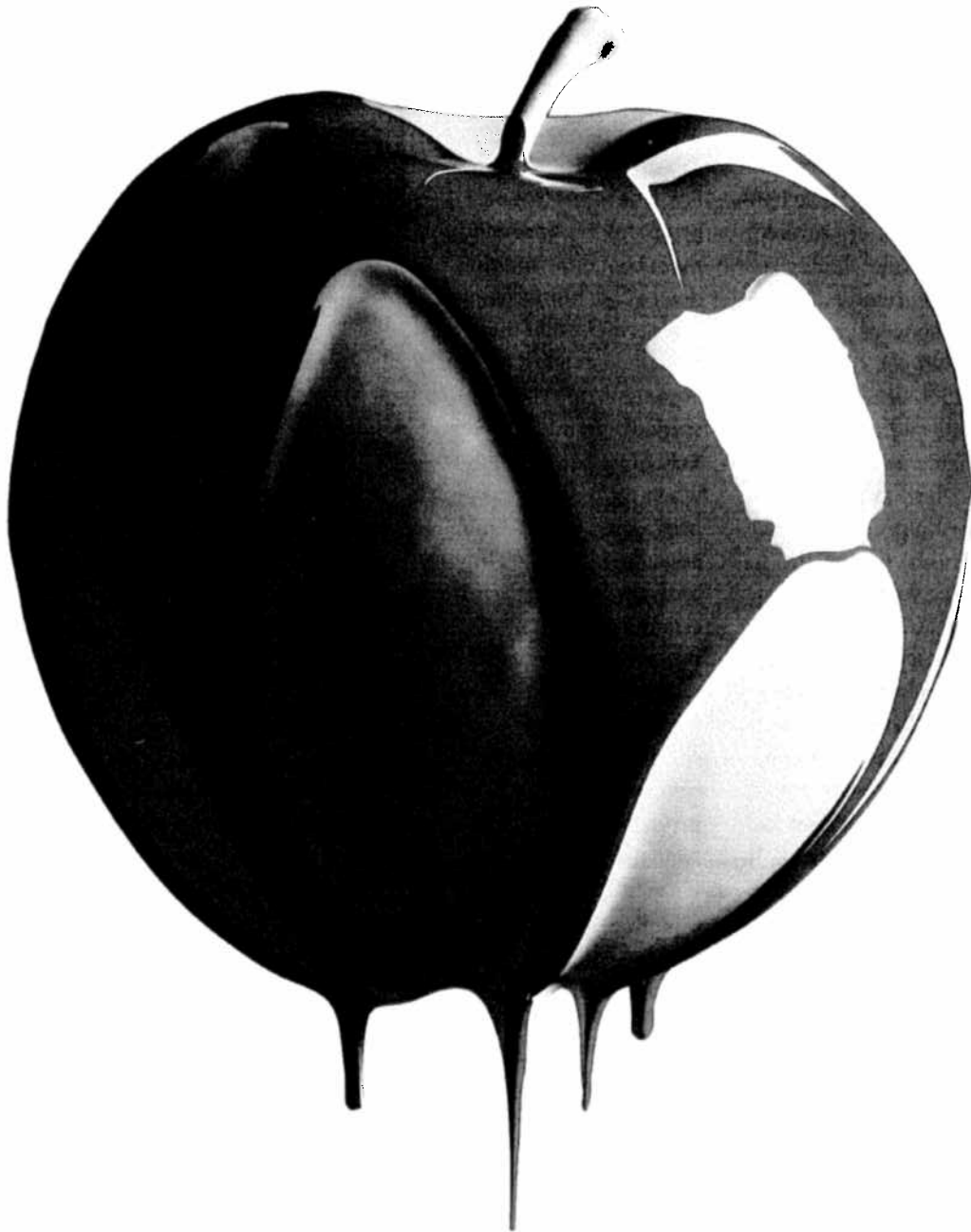


the importance of
CORE

DISCIPLINE

John A. Deskins and Stephanie Morris Lorenze



Arguments for arts education typically reference the potential of the arts to improve students' test scores in mathematics and language arts.

Such arguments devalue the arts and disregard their ability to help students learn 21st century skills.

Arts classes should be taught by certified arts teachers, who can help students use the arts to make connections between disciplines and between school and the real world.

Support for arts education is a favorite issue in the education media. Policymakers of all stripes routinely declare their devotion to the arts and its importance in students' lives. They often cite findings that students who have arts education outperform their peers on most indicators of academic achievement. Many will relate their own experiences in a music or art class and fondly recall a favorite arts teacher who encouraged them. Yet when it comes to making tough decisions regarding resources, the arts are frequently sacrificed. Especially in the nation's poorest schools, dance, theatre, visual arts, and music may be viewed as enrichment, rather than core academic disciplines.

One strategy is to argue for arts education in relation to other core subjects. Research indicates that students who have had arts education surpass their peers on standardized tests (Catterall, 2009). In fact, a recent study of a cohort of students in West Virginia found that those with an arts-rich high school experience scored higher in mathematics and reading/language arts. This finding generally held true even for students of lower socioeconomic status or with disabilities (Whisman & Hixson, in press). Many arts advocates justify the importance of their subjects because they have the potential to increase student achievement in mathematics and language arts. As a result, the arts tend to be the step-children of those disciplines.

In spite of the evidence, many schools have made the decision to narrow the curriculum. Student access to arts classes has steadily declined over the last 10 years, with alarming drops in dance and theatre (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities [PCAH], 2011). Although the arts are defined as core academic subjects by NCLB, that idea is not apparent in most schools. As Robinson (2001) noted, no school system in the world teaches dance to its students every day as they do mathematics.

Eisner (2002) wrote that student learning and understanding are influenced by what is absent from curricula. Therefore, students' understanding of the value of the arts is unintentionally influenced by their lack of access. As a result, many students leave school without the skills, understanding, and habits of mind that are essential to success in the 21st century. This narrow, unbalanced curriculum leads to narrow, unbalanced students (Robinson, 2001).

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Educating the Whole Student

The arts enable students to understand what it means to be human. They provide ways to understand the world. They give life meaning and purpose. They are a source of joy. They are avenues for creative expression and meaning making. They are unique forms of literacy and communication. They are central to human culture, society, and history. In many ways, knowledge of the arts is central to what it means to be an educated person. As Dewey (1934) said, "Art cannot be separated from the human experience" (p. 1).

Arts education offers students opportunities to learn the following habits of mind and skills, which are not always addressed by other subjects:

- Creativity, innovation, problem solving, and other 21st century skills. Creativity and innovation are among the top five important skills that employers value in workers (PCAH, 2011).
- Social competencies, such as empathy and collaboration. The arts have long been considered the language of the emotions, and many school arts experiences are unique opportunities for students to work together toward a common objective. Pink (2005) said, "These high touch aptitudes are

moving from the periphery of our lives to the center" (p. 53).

- Global awareness and diverse cultural perspectives. Students in arts classes experience world cultures directly through the study of dance, theatre, visual art, and music.

- Reflection and connection with the world through authentic encounters and experiences. Arts classrooms are places

where students' senses are awakened and they are encouraged to reflect and question.

A comprehensive arts education plays a key role in meeting the needs of the whole student and provides ways to personalize learning. Mark DeFazio, the principal at Bridgeport (WV) High School, believes that the arts are essential to ensuring student success at the secondary level. He said, "It is very important that we offer students courses that not only provide them with the skills that today's economy demands, but also allow them to experience learning that is of interest and value to them personally" (personal communication, July 3, 2012).

DeFazio's philosophy is in evidence at Bridgeport. Students have opportunities to enroll in a variety of arts courses, including media arts, theatre, guitar, piano, visual art, band, dance, show choir, and orchestra. Course offerings are sequential, standards-based, and taught by certified arts educators. "The learning outcomes I have seen as a result of good arts education are substantial for all students, including students with disabilities," said DeFazio. "I believe in arts education because I believe all students deserve to be successful, no matter the medium" (personal communication, July 3, 2012).

Building a Comprehensive Program

A comprehensive arts education program has many elements, but they can be grouped into four essential components, four key delivery strategies, and one creative culmination.

FOUR ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

Sequential standards-based instruction. As in all core academic subjects, the desired student competencies that are fostered in arts classes require sequential instruction from an educator who has a deep understanding of the content, standards, and pedagogy. Certified arts educators are the best equipped to deliver this instruction. Although supplemental arts providers, such as visiting artists, bring important real-world experience to students, they are not trained to deliver standards-based instruction in the school environment. [See Richerme, Shuler, & McCaffrey (2012) for a detailed explanation of the roles of arts education providers.]

Equity of access. All students should receive equitable



Schools help students make connections between their learning and real-world experiences by enlisting the support of the community. Residencies by teaching artists, visits to museums, and so forth extend student learning beyond the limits of the school building and instructional day.



access to an arts education, regardless of disability or poverty. Yet a recent report from the PCAH (2011) found that children from the nation's poorest schools have significantly diminished arts opportunities compared with their more affluent counterparts. In fact, a recent study indicates that low-income students who study the arts are more likely to attend and do well in college, obtain employment in later life, and volunteer in their communities (Catterall, 2009). As US secretary of education Arne Duncan (2012) has noted, "The arts opportunity gap is widest for children in high-poverty schools. This is absolutely an equity issue and a civil rights issue."

Teacher efficacy. Extensive professional preparation is necessary to teach the arts. Certified arts educators are uniquely equipped from content and pedagogical standpoints to facilitate sequential standards-based learning in the arts. As districts nationwide take up the issue of teacher evaluation, care should be taken to ensure that arts teachers are evaluated on the basis of their efficacy in the arts classroom. However well-intentioned, evaluating arts teachers on the basis of student performance on summative assessments that measure language arts and mathematics devalues arts education and does not ensure teacher competency in the arts.

Appropriate assessment. Although arts instruction supports learning across the curriculum, student assessment in the arts should center on the skills and knowledge embodied in the arts standards. Given the performance-based nature of the arts disciplines, performance assessment should be the de facto mode of gathering evidence of student learning.

FOUR KEY DELIVERY STRATEGIES

General arts instruction. General arts instruction includes courses that provide a broad overview of a discipline, such as a general music class. Secondary schools should also offer entry-level electives for all students, such as appreciation and history, which encourage students to investigate connections between arts disciplines, other content areas, and the world outside the school environment.

Specialized arts instruction. To personalize learning and allow students to develop advanced skills within a chosen discipline, secondary schools should endeavor to provide a broad range of arts electives that include opportunities for

both individual and group artistic experiences.

Arts integration. Arts integration is the concurrent teaching of both arts and non-arts standards to mastery, such as a dramatic re-interpretation of a book read in class or a unit on the physics of music. Effective arts integration requires collaboration between a certified arts educator and other content teachers.

Extended learning opportunities. Schools help students make connections between their learning and real-world experiences by enlisting the support of the community. Residencies by teaching artists, visits to museums, and so forth extend student learning beyond the limits of the school building and instructional day. Extended learning opportunities may take place during the regular instructional day or outside of the school environment, but they should always supplement sequential standards-based arts instruction.

ONE CREATIVE CULMINATION

In the arts, students—particularly at the higher levels—have opportunities to showcase their work in public and semipublic settings. Showcases of student work are not only essential to the nature of the art forms themselves, but they also serve to build students' confidence and self-esteem. Teachers and students should be encouraged to share evidence of the learning that has taken place in the classroom.

Conclusion

Although advocating for arts education in relation to other core content areas is valid and supported with research, the position of the arts in schools must change. To meet the needs of students in the 21st century, schools must upgrade the position of the arts and give students the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in college, in careers, and in life. A comprehensive arts program is uniquely suited to this important task. **PL**